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March 1992

approach

The Naval Aviation Safety Review

1991 approach Writing Awards

We are pleased to announce the winners of the *Approach* writing awards for 1991. We've also added a category: Photographer of the Year.

Contributions over the past year have been exceptional, and choosing winners in each category was difficult. All the authors who were published contributed to the success of the magazine and to aviation safety.

Congratulations to VA-95 for winning their fourth award and to PH1 Parsons as the first photo winner.

We thank everyone who took the time to write something and send it to us, even if we couldn't use it, or just couldn't find a spot for it. The Naval Safety Center and *Approach* congratulate this year's winners.

Lt. Steve Halsted
Editor

Command Writing Award

VA-95 (fourth consecutive year)

Article of the Year

"The Milk Run" by Capt. Tom Longo, USMC, HMM-162. (Capt. Longo is currently assigned to VT-3 and NASC, NAS Pensacola.)

Honorable Mention

"My Harley's Last Ride" by Lt. Tom Dostie, VA-72. (Lt. Dostie is currently transitioning to the F/A-18 with VFA-106.)

"Sometimes You Get the 'X'; Sometimes the 'X' Gets You" by Lt. Ross Wilhelm and Lt. Timothy Holley, VA-145

Contributor of the Year

LCdr. C.H. Maynard, VFA-204

Honorable Mention

Cdr. Mark Danielson,
Safety Officer, NAS Dallas

Photographer of the Year

PH1 Michael S. Parsons, USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-72). (PH1 Parsons is currently assigned to Fleet Imaging Center Atlantic.)

Honorable Mention

George Hall, Mill Valley, California

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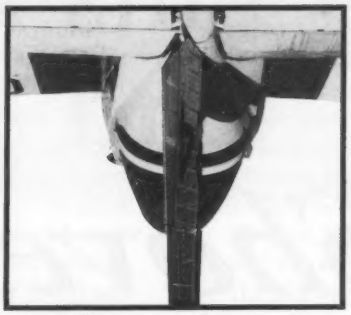

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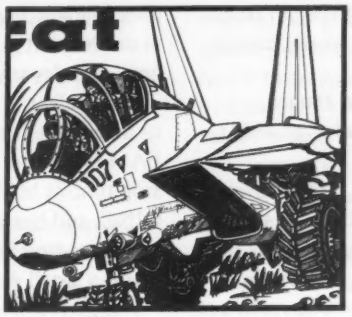

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On the cover: A Coast Guard HU-25 Falcon over the oil fires in Kuwait. (USCG Photo)

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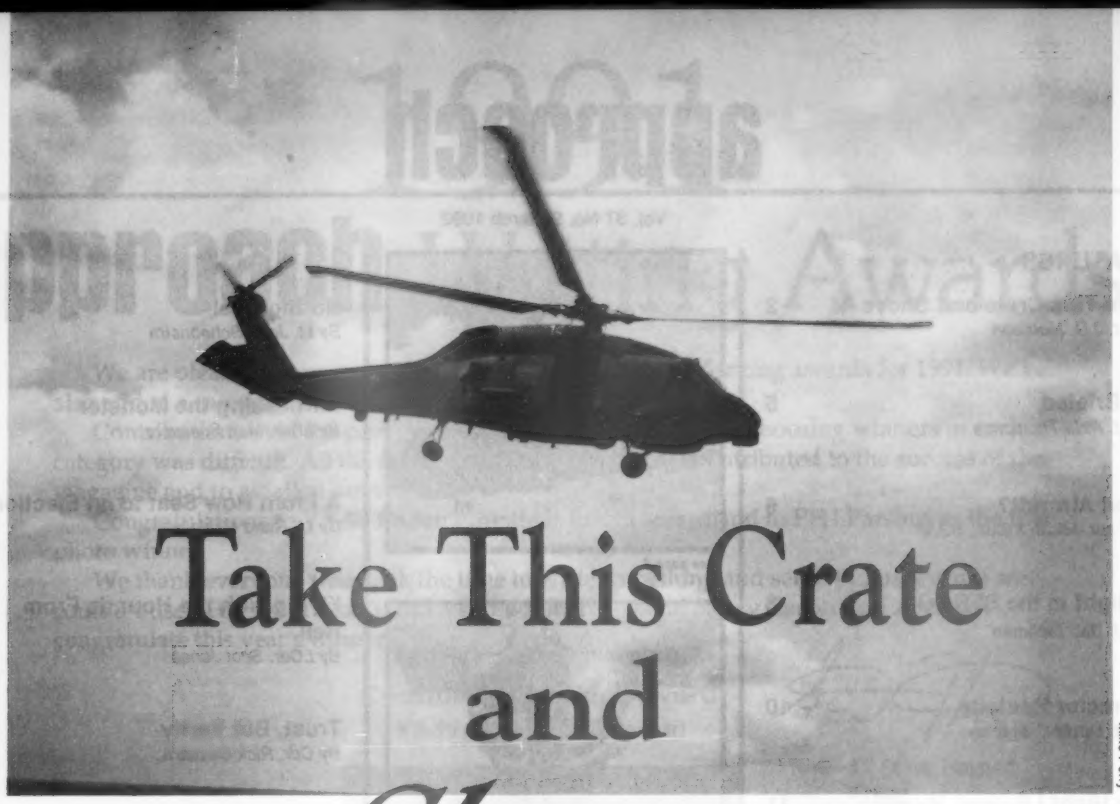


Mike Perry

Take This Crate and *Shove It!*

By Lt J.D. Morrison

It was a glorious afternoon, our first day back underway after six days in port. Our mission was to run our ship's XO and combat systems officer over to USS *Independence* (CV-62) for a briefing and then return several hours later to bring them back to our ship, USS *Bunker Hill* (CG-52).

The trip over went OK. We contacted the carrier well in advance of our arrival, and entered starboard delta about 10 minutes before our scheduled overhead. We also made a point of reviewing the HOSTAC* to be sure we had the landing-spot numbering system straight. We were eager to prove that we had our act together in front of our "new girlfriend in the battle group" as our captain put it.

"Seahawk, you're cleared port side close aboard, expect spot 4 1/2", boomed the voice of god over what had been, up until then, a weak circuit.

Since we had been cleared close aboard, I took tower at their word and made my pass slow and close so that I could visually confirm our assigned landing area. As I was coming abeam the spot I saw the LSE standing in position to receive us and raising his arms over his head.

"I guess he's ready for us, after all," I said. Everyone agreed, even though we hadn't been expressly cleared to land; it seemed obvious what they wanted us to do. I smoothly arrested our forward motion while sliding in to expedite the landing and must have gotten within two or three rotor diameters of the deck edge before tower came up again.

"Just hold on there, Seahawk, we'll get you in here in a minute."

Embarrassed, I gave my saltiest "Roger, Boss" and took it around left side. We received clearance to come in on the next go around, landed, dropped off our passengers, and departed without further difficulty.

Once clear, I realized that our current position offered us an excellent training opportunity to work into the FAM pattern at NAS Barbers Point. We juggled our pit-stop time at homeplate, got permission from our det OINC, and headed in to hone our skills with autorotations, running landings, and all the fun things you can't do on a small deck.

** Helicopter Operations from Ships Other Than Aircraft Carriers Supplement*

We conscientiously checked in with LAMPS deck control every 15 minutes and departed for homeplate and a drink before our second overhead.

Independence wasn't as easy to find this time around. The TACAN was down because there were no flight ops scheduled. LAMPS deck had lost the carrier's track so accurate vectors were unavailable, and our IFF system wasn't breaking them out either. Eventually, we separated them from the radar clutter with a short-count ADF cut. We still managed to arrive ahead of schedule, though, and promised ourselves not to make any mistakes this time in.

As we sat on deck and watched our passengers approach we again heard the voice from on high, "Seahawk, secure your collision lights". I automatically "rogered" the call while staring in disbelief at the guilty switch I could have sworn I secured during landing checks. (In reaching for it across the cockpit, I had missed it by one switch and toggled the lights from "upper only" to "both" instead of from "day" to "off".)

We quickly quenched the offending strobes. The passengers strapped in and I thought we were all set; then I noticed my crewman in the midst of what was becoming a very animated conversation with one of the green shirts sporting a set of radio interphones. I could see the LSE growing impatient to get us airborne and I wasn't looking forward to another slap from tower. But it was clear that my aircrewman was having a strong disagreement about something.

I eventually managed to get his attention and indicated my interest in what the problem was.

"A box." He pointed aft beyond my field of vision. The cargo ATO paused several times to consult the people on the other end of his headset as the two of them went on debating the subject for several minutes. Finally, the crewman returned to the aircraft and plugged into the ICS.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"They want us to take some cargo," he answered. "I tried to tell them we don't have room and we can come back for it, but they've loaded it anyway."

I looked back to see a large container between the passenger seat and the door.

"Can you move it up into the tunnel (between the pilots' seats and the cabin area)?"

"No, it won't fit there either, and it's too heavy to move."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, but they are insisting we take it now."

"Hey, maybe this is the part our other aircraft has been waiting for," I thought. It had been on order for several weeks now and I remembered hearing that it was finally on its way a few days ago. We had been expecting to receive it while still in port.

"Can you close the door?" I asked.

"No, it overhangs the cabin by a couple of inches."

Right then a little voice told me that I had a problem, but I really wanted the part so that we could return our second bird to full-mission capable status. Even if it wasn't the part we were expecting, it clearly had to be very important by the way the cargo ATO was carrying on.

"Is it secure?" I asked.

"Yes. It weighs 420 pounds. It's not going anywhere," he assured me.

I looked back again and saw him leaning over the shipping crate with a gunner's belt in hand.

"Ah, there's one resourceful crewman," I thought. "He's using that gunner's belt to make sure the box is strapped down."

"OK," I announced. "No right turns, keep it fairly slow, and be sure to maintain balanced flight."

As we lifted off and reported "ops normal," the Boss expressed his hope of seeing us again soon. "Seahawk, you be sure your crewman has his sleeves rolled down before he comes back here"

"Yes, sir," was about all I could muster. "Man, strike three!" I thought. "Guess we are outta here."

The XO wanted to know how long before we got back home so I asked my copilot for pigeons and gradually nosed it over to 100 KIAS. We steadied out on course and were about eight miles from *Independence* when...

"Damn! It just fell out, I'm not kidding!" The crewman shouted.

"Turn right, now!" added my copilot, and I banked hard.

"There was just no stopping it. I was barely able to get my hand out of the handle," continued the crewman. As we rolled out of our turn, the crate came into view, floating hinges up.

"OK, let's mark the spot and get some direction on this," I said. We called LAMPS deck and told them of our little accident. We continued to orbit the crate, hoping that it would stay afloat and that the part was still inside (not a very likely possibility, considering that it had broken open on impact and was floating pretty high).

Obviously, we couldn't retrieve the container ourselves with only one crewman (not to mention the passengers onboard) so we asked homeplate if we should notify *Independence* to coordinate an H-3 recovery. They advised us that a shipboard recovery would be made and directed us to recover for crew swap. After marking the crate with a couple of sonobuoys we bustered home to LAMPS deck, still 36 miles away but closing fast. We

landed, refueled, and briefed our relieving crew on the true winds and drift rate of the crate (which was significantly greater than that of our smoke, because of the crate's surface area above the water). We prepared for some major explaining. Our relief relocated the crate and the ship completed the recovery, but the container was in about the same condition as my ego: empty, badly dented, and all wet.

Where did we go wrong? Let me count the ways!

Failure to compartmentalize. We let our earlier embarrassments inhibit us from drawing further attention to ourselves. We should have overcome our earlier mistakes and concentrated on the issue at hand.

External comms. From his conversation with the cargo ATO, the crewman mistakenly believed that the pilots were coordinating with the tower. Despite the fact that no one ever spoke to us on the radios about this unscheduled cargo, we should have taken the initiative to get the story straight from the people in the know: what it was, where it was going, and who it was for.

HAC responsibilities. As the aircraft commander I did not intervene on behalf of my crewman. Although he appeared to have the situation well in hand (including comms between the ATO and his bosses), when it became apparent that he did not want to take the cargo, I should have questioned him. In this case, I should have backed him up, even if it meant shutting down the bird and kicking out that crate.

Judgement. We did not stop to satisfy our doubts as far as the safety of the flight was concerned. There were no carrier ops scheduled that day so any pressure to get off the deck in a hurry was purely internal. The difficulty involved in getting another overhead time is pretty minimal compared to the SAR effort we staged in recovering the container. In other words, when your "little voice" starts talking, it's time to stop, listen, and act.

Rationalization. Once we had the cargo aboard we justified taking it with all kinds of arbitrary limitations based on nothing but guesses. There was no way to know how fast we could go, how hard we could bank, or how far out of balance we could fly given the amount of sail area the box presented in relation to its weight.

Once the slipstream started it moving, it slid out like a greased pig and there was truly no stopping it. Given that the crewman was sitting next to the container gripping the handle to keep an eye on it, he was fortunate not to have followed it out.

Crew coordination. Finally, and most importantly, was the breakdown in crew communication and coordination. Had my copilot challenged me, rather than accepting the situation on the assumption that the HAC "knows what he's doing", we probably would not have taken the crate. If I had clarified what I meant by "secure" with the crewman, we probably would not have taken it either. When I saw him with the gunner's belt in hand, I thought he was securing the cargo somehow. Unfortunately, he was wearing the gunner's belt and believed that the container's considerable weight and position in the cabin would be enough to keep it in place during the ride home.

Lastly, had the cargo ATO communicated to us what the cargo actually was, and where it was supposed to go, we definitely would not have taken it off with it. (I'll explain why shortly.)

We were extremely lucky. If our cargo had been any lighter or more aerodynamic it could have easily hit the aircraft's stabilator or tail rotor on the way out. What turned out to be an embarrassing incident would have been much more costly in terms of aircraft and lives if we had been forced to autorotate with a loss of tail-rotor control.

Now, here's the kicker. The "vital part" we let the carrier load against our better judgement wasn't for us at all! Apparently, the crate contained an H-3 dipping sonar transducer headed for the beach.

I took numerous unnecessary risks in trying to be the "can do" guy we are all trained to be, only to end up with several valuable lessons and a new call sign, "Mark Dip". ➤

Lt. Morrison flew SH-60s with HSL-43. He is currently an instructor pilot with HSL-41.

Mike Perry

As Briefed

By Lt. Pete Thompson

Somewhere between three ground jobs and the target area, a preflight occurs. The toughest job in naval aviation may not actually be flying, but getting *ready* to fly. There isn't one aviator who doesn't know what NATOPS expects of us during the brief, let alone SOP, but how many of us adopt the form and leave out the content?

What does "standard" mean in the following context? "Ordnance checks and RTB will be standard." How about this one? "Ground and takeoff emergencies will be handled as standard and in accordance with NATOPS." I recently decided to start asking for an elaboration when "that" word comes up in a brief.

There are always contingencies in every hop, which make it *non*-routine. You can scrutinize almost all of these factors before the briefing.

How about the phrase "as briefed" – normally used during the second leg of a cross-country at an unfamiliar field and as a side effect of a terrible case of get-home-itis? This phrase has a lot of weight when shared between aircrews. It says, "We'll hack it, and if you're Dash 2 or 3, you'll hack it, too." And there, at 2,000 feet AGL, descending through a layer that will "clear any second", riding with a guy you were certain would skirt around the cloud, you realize that neither of you briefed the low level. Flying an actual SRTC (Search Radar Terrain Clearance) at 1,500 feet, with the route not quite VFR, can be a difficult time to search for a pop-up frequency.

The pressure to keep things moving is monumental. Why we use those abused phrases during a brief is a worthwhile question. Maybe they would be valuable if we at least debriefed the multiple mistakes we made in the "as briefed" portion of the hop. But, too often we gaff off the debrief with a tired "Got anything for me?" as we walk out the door with our jacket and keys.

JOs may not agree with this litany, given the fact that we are a pretty capable group that doesn't look for trouble. Why aren't we learning from our mistakes? Do we file them away in an unreachable category and only retrieve them during our department head tour? Maybe we should look at the squadron atmosphere more closely and wonder whether we are truly safe.

It takes time to learn and it takes honest debriefs without snide accusations. If I die from the fear of ready room competition or the CO's wrath, that *would* be a shame. I'd rather die in my sleep. ◀

Lt. Thompson is a first-tour BN with VA-52.

Peter Mersky

What

By Capt. Micah Killion, USAF

Our squadron was deployed to NAS Fallon. We were honing our air wing's combat skills and giving our enemies a reason for losing sleep at night. My pilot and I were scheduled as Dash 2 in a flight of three A-6s, which was participating in a coordinated MINEX against the godless citizens of Santa Rosa Island. After the MINEX, we would return to Fallon for practice plugs on a KC-135. The MINEX was canceled halfway to the target because of weather, and our flight of three returned for the refueling rodeo.

The refueling players were given the airspace FL180 and below, with the tanker at angels 17. We were in hot pursuit at angels 16 and opposite circle to the 135. No one could see the big buddy store, although we were all looking, anxious to be the first to call tally-ho. We were in a left echelon turn, passing through 360, when I looked forward to clear my side and saw a fly speck in the distance. My first thought was that the tanker had been given bad position reports (you know those Air Force dudes and how they lie), followed by the realization that we were going beak to beak with another aircraft.

"Traffic on the nose!" I yelled to my pilot as my eyes went to the max wide zone. He dove to the right, extending us about two-to-three ship lengths before an F/A-18 flew between us and lead! Later, we found out that Dash 3's BN had spotted the errant Hornet around the same time we had and maneuvered to avoid both of us. After both wingmen rejoined on lead and heart rates returned to normal, we continued on to the KC-135 for our practice plugs, which didn't seem to be such a big deal anymore.

This NMAC raises a couple of issues. First, just because you

are scheduled for the airspace does not mean there's no one else around. In our case, a Hornet squadron was training with the aggressors in the airspace above ours. One of the players got a little too exuberant. He blew through the floor of his airspace and, instead of climbing, he simply leveled off to figure out where the flight was.

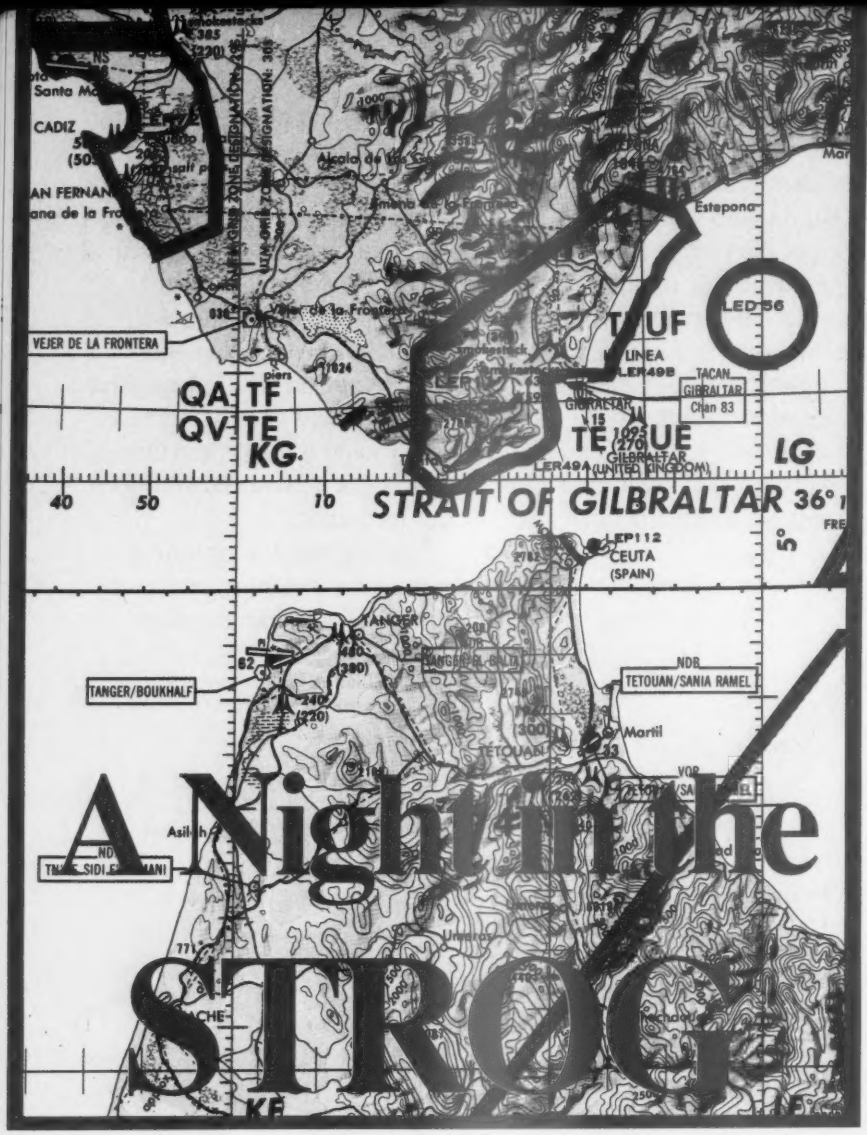
Second, in the debrief we discovered that the lead had been unaware of the entire incident! The pilot and BN had a bet on who would be the first to spot the tanker, so both were looking at nine o'clock when the Hornet passed by. This is the second time in my career when a flight lead flew me that close to another aircraft. Aircrews must coordinate their search patterns. Or, in aviator's jargon, "look out where the other one ain't." That applies to where the lead is looking as well. Also, the medium-attack community tends to be springloaded to the idea that we always fly in cruise unless we are at low level. Briefing and flying more medium altitude tac wing and combat spread will reduce pilot workload and greatly increase the amount of time (and the number of eyes) needed to look out for traffic.

As for me, I'm spending more time watching out for the other guy and looking after number one! ◄

Capt. Killion is an exchange BN with VA-52. When not flying Intruders, he flies F-111 Aardvarks.

Aircraft?

"Traffic on the nose!" I yelled to my pilot as my eyes went to the max wide zone.



A Night in the STROG

By Lt. Bob Dishman

At 0015 the SDO knocked at the door and called, "Launch the ready."

My crew quickly assembled and rushed to the aircraft. My tactical coordinator (TACCO) and I got a quick tactical and safety-of-flight brief from the ASW operations center (ASWOC).

We were airborne within the hour, and were on station in the Straits of Gibraltar (STROG) 15 minutes later. Two P-3Cs were already on station monitoring sonobuoy patterns at opposite ends of the STROG. We were to relieve the aircraft on the Atlantic side of the STROG and establish a sonobuoy barrier in anticipation of a Soviet submarine entering the Mediterranean.

The strait presents an interesting environment for tracking submarines. It is approximately 40 miles long and less than eight miles wide at its narrowest point, with 3,000-foot mountains bordering either side. The shipping density is phenomenal, averaging several hundred transiting ships per day; this night was no exception. We arrived on-station at our briefed altitude of 6,000 feet, and established communications and TACAN air-to-air with our playmate who was at 1,500 feet.

After coordinating an altitude swap, he departed station and returned to Rota. We then contacted the aircraft monitoring the barrier on the Mediterranean side of the STROG and established TACAN air-to-air separation. He was 50 miles away at 1,500 feet. We descended to 2,500 feet at the approaches to the STROG and monitored our buoy pattern.

I felt comfortable at this point. We had 1,000 feet and 50 miles separating us from the other aircraft. Although, we were below the minimum operational safe altitude (MOSA), we were west of the STROG, which allowed for considerable maneuvering space. Less than 90 minutes earlier I had been asleep in my rack.

Just as we were about to reseed our buoy pattern, our acoustic operator called contact on a buoy located in the STROG which was approximately 10 miles east of our position. TACAN air-to-air indicated 48 DME. We called our playmate and descended to 400 feet so that we could use the magnetic anomaly detection (MAD) system. The cockpit became very busy.

We could not see the Moroccan coast to the south; however, the lights from Gibraltar partly illuminated the northern coastline. My navigator-communicator was busy relaying tactical information to the other aircraft and the ASWOC, using secure communications. The radar was secured so as to not interfere with the MAD system. I established a left-hand racetrack pattern so that I could turn toward the northern coast and remain on the north side of the STROG. I was using the infrared detecting set (IRDS) to confirm my visual references. A quick scan of the DME indicated the other aircraft was 25 miles away.

After three hours it was time for a

seat swap. P-3s have the luxury of rotating pilots during extended flights. The rotation with three pilots is three hours at the flight controls with a 90-minute break. However, with the varying degrees of flying skills and tactical experience between pilots, this rotation is not always a luxury. At 400 feet, using visual references for safety of flight, I decided to remain at the pilot station until my relief pilot was comfortable with both the tactical and safety situation.

The pilots swapped seats at the copilot station. At this time our playmate said he was going to reseed his barrier, which was 20 miles east of our position. We continued to track the sub on an easterly course for the next 30 minutes. TACAN air-to-air showed 13 DME and was decreasing. We were heading east inbound for a buoy drop when I decided to give our playmate a call to ensure we had altitude separation and that he had finished reseeding his barrier.

"Lima Papa Four, request you verify altitude."

"Roger," he replied, "300."

"Say again," I called.

"Roger, Lima Papa Four's at 300 feet."

DME was now passing eight miles and decreasing. We immediately broke off and turned west.

I called my playmate. "Request you climb to 1,000 feet and suspend all buoy drops."

"Roger."

This incident may seem trivial to the TACAIR community since the two aircraft never came closer than five to six miles. However, given the recent increase in P-3 mishaps and in particular, the recent midair collision, I felt we needed to tell other people about our incident.

When I first read the midair mishap investigation, I found it inconceivable that two aircraft with two-way communications and TACAN air-to-air could have a midair. Yet, our incident occurred in exactly the same environment.

We were in VMC at night with cockpit-to-cockpit VHF and a good TACAN air-to-air lock-on. Why did this potential mishap occur? Our debriefing with the other crew revealed the following information.

Just before descending from 1,500 feet to 300 feet, the flight crew of the other aircraft swapped seats and, during the turnover, failed to notify my aircraft of the descent. Though we had TACAN air-to-air, the other aircraft was not displaying DME and therefore, did not know the relative distance between the two aircraft.

P-3 crews are accustomed to independent open-ocean ASW operations. Most of our training involves single aircraft prosecutions with established procedures for aircraft turnovers at on-station and off-station. Given the P-3's reliability, the greatest threat facing the maritime patrol community is a midair. We all must improve our cockpit lookout doctrine and ensure positive altitude separation at all times. Pilot seat swaps should only occur after a thorough passdown of both the tactical and flight-safety situation.

I often wonder what would have happened if I had not made that call to the other aircraft to verify altitude. Would we have seen the red strobes of the other aircraft while marking on top a buoy? I'll never know, and I hope I'll never have to find out.

Lt. Dishman served with VP-5. He is currently assigned to the Naval Postgraduate School in the test pilot cooperative program.

Altimeter Roulette

By Lt. David S. Mantay

The remains of Typhoons Orchid and Pat took up a large portion of the weather prognostic chart. The area was now downgraded to an intense low-pressure system as the two storms became one. The forecaster began his weather brief by saying, "I'm glad I'm not flying today."

We took off from NAS Adak and flew an uneventful (yet IMC) transit to the op area, which was the center of the storm and low pressure front. Our mission was to fly a typical open-ocean surveillance flight; we were tasked with identifying and collecting photo intelligence of all units in the area. Based on the weather forecast it would be a very uncomfortable ride at 300 feet, especially for three or four hours.

The SS-3 cleared us below with the radar and we began a gradual descent to onstation. When we reached ALTIMETERS on the descent checklist, the PPC and I referenced the HWD for the altimeter setting that I had gotten at the weather office. Our onstation altimeter was forecast to be 29.58 inches. We turned our altimeters down from 29.92, which we had set at FL200, to29.58. The flight engineer also said that he would cycle the circuit breaker for the radar altimeter warning system (RAWS) at 4,000 feet as required by NATOPS.

Our seasoned ASW crew manned their stations and checked in with the TACCO. We were confident in our abilities, having recently flown several "real world" ASW missions.

On station, with pouring rain, moderate turbulence, and IMC, the inertials showed winds increasing through 70 knots as we continued our let-down to the assigned onstation altitude. As we descended through 5,000 feet on the barometric altimeter, the radar altimeter failed to activate. We checked the circuit breaker and system power.

Since the upper limit of the radar altimeter is 5,000 feet AGL, we kept an eye on it, confident that the forecast altimeter setting was probably off by a tenth of an inch at most (i.e., 29.48 vice 29.58), or that perhaps there was some altimeter error in the system. With the baro altimeter reading 4,000 feet in IMC, I elected to level off and have the flight engineer cycle the radar altimeter circuit breaker to ensure that the copilot was backing me up on instruments.

The PPC in the right seat noticed that we were now marginal VMC and said that it appeared we were much lower than the 4,000 feet indicated on the barometric altimeters.

After we cycled the circuit breaker for the radar altimeter for the third time, the radar altimeter came to life, with the needle indicating 2,000 feet! The cockpit crew married up the baro altimeters with the radalt, and we were surprised to see a reading of 28.28 – well below predicted numbers.

We descended to see if we could break out, and at 300 feet (on the radar altimeter) we were still marginal VMC.

The Flight Information Handbook outlines altimeter settings as equivalent to 1,000 feet per inch of mercury, i.e., 29.92 to28.92. A quick calculation told us that changing altimeters from 29.58 to 28.28 actually equates to 1,300 feet lower than the baro altimeter indicated we were!

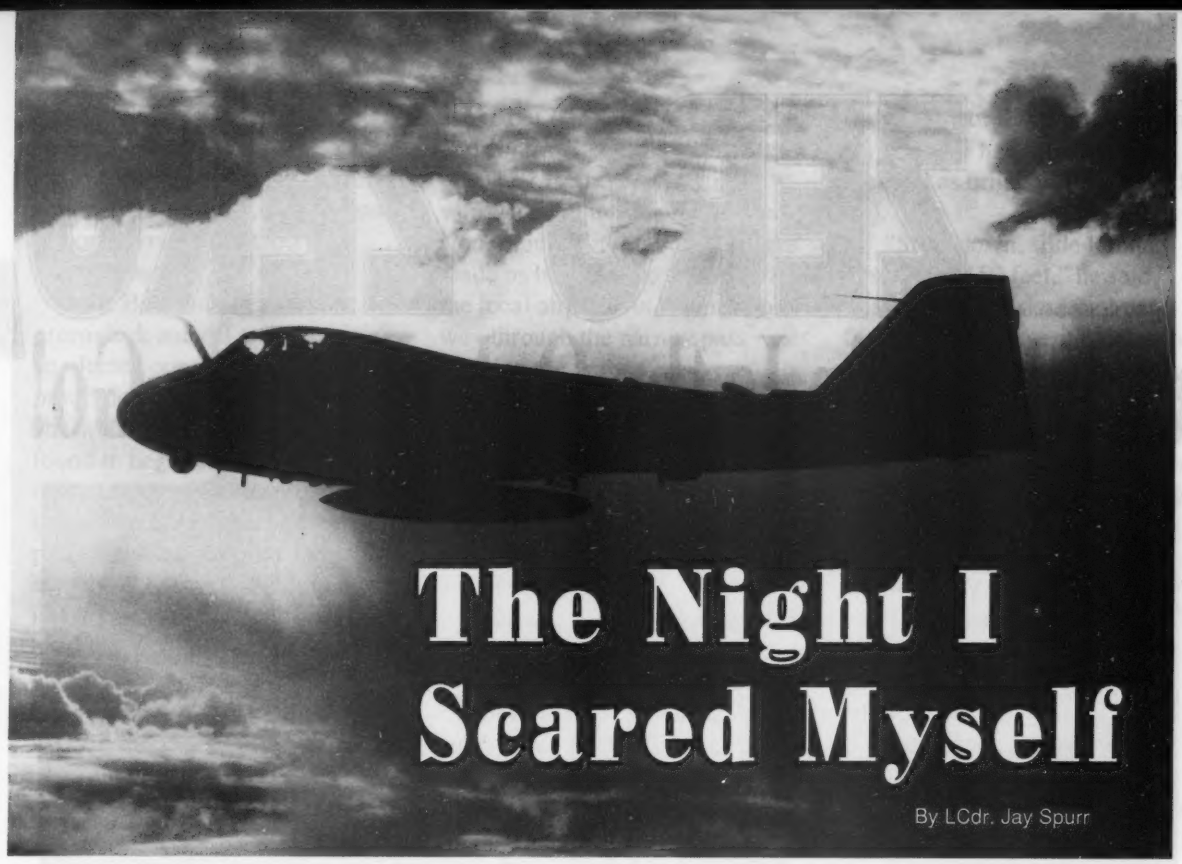
P-3 NATOPS does not mandate the instrument requirements you must use as guidelines in IMC conditions. However, OPORDER 201 states that you should consider not descending below 1,000 feet without a current altimeter setting, a setting received from a surface unit or another aircraft in the operating area. If we had been IMC to the deck or, worse yet, flying at night, even with the 1,000-foot buffer, the consequences would have been disastrous.

I submitted an urgent change recommendation requesting a reevaluation and clarification of altimeter-reset procedures by the P-3 NATOPS Model Manager.

Cockpit awareness and crew coordination is important, especially in the IMC environment. We had the presence of mind to level off and evaluate our need for an operational radar altimeter well above the "gouge" minimum 1,000 feet. If we had continued our descent to 1,000 feet, we might not have had that option.

Our lessons learned included setting the forecast altimeter or 29.92, whichever is lower, before descending, and ensuring that the navigator updates his altimeter to the onstation setting as a backup for the flight station. We have also reemphasized sticking to published guidelines that require an updated altimeter setting prior to descent below 1,000 feet without an operable radar altimeter. ◄

Lt. Mantay is a pilot in VP-50.



The Night I Scared Myself

By LCdr. Jay Spurr

The night was darker than I had ever seen. There was no horizon. It was my first A-6 cruise and my first IO period. Up to the moment I checked in with marshal, everything went as briefed. The ship decided to take me out of the stack (I have to assume it was because we had a lot of gas) to investigate a light in the water five miles aft.

My BN and I talked about what we would do when we got below 2,000 feet MSL. We talked about the radar altimeter and where we should set it. We discussed how much angle of bank I would fly and how low we would go before it got too uncomfortable. We even talked about who would look at what and when, inside and outside of the aircraft. We had a plan.

The helos were on deck getting refueled, the ship was dead in the water, and everyone had received a "delta" when we began our approach. We crossed perpendicular to the BRC and saw the light. We decided to set up an orbit around it and got a little lower. We leveled off at 500 feet and started our next pass. We picked up the light again and started circling so my BN could get some particulars. The radalt went off and my heart raced.

I leveled the wings, raised the nose, and pushed the throttles forward. I never went below 1,000 feet for a long time afterward, and never without my wings level.

Back in the ready room, my BN asked what happened. It was painfully obvious: I had done what I said I would not do, what my BN didn't expect me to do since he was supposed to be looking outside. I had rubbernecked and lost my situational awareness. The bug was set at 200 feet. I remember glancing at the AOB. It was more than 30 degrees and the VSI was down – how much, I don't know. It was the closest I have come to killing myself.

Intruders are supposed to be in the weeds at night, in bad weather, alone or in gaggles. Our terrain clearance, low-level tactics, and crew coordination have improved a lot since I first started flying A-6s. The aircraft still has the worst instrument layout any pilot would want, but it has the required instruments and we adapt accordingly.

Whether you fly multiseat or single-seat, no matter how many gadgets you have at your disposal, brief it thoroughly, fly what you brief, and scan your instruments religiously.

The division of labor in multiseat cockpits must be specific, with each crewman checking the other. SA is critical, and when it's dark, your gauges are your life. Read 'em or weep! ◄

LCdr. Spurr is an A-6 pilot with VA-165.

By Lt. Ed Donohoe

ZERO-ZERO, and the Ship Is the Only Place to Go!

The unsolicited delivery of pastries from the bakery highlighted the 0500 gathering in the ready room. We started to brief our assigned flight as channel sweep for our CV's sortie from a South American port. We would be the only launch of the morning. The weather was forecast to be VFR and once we completed the channel sweep we were to pick up and return the harbor pilots for both the CV and the escort FFG.

The SDO briefed weather and reviewed the in-port flying gouge. I threw my two cents in on what the navigation check points looked like since I had flown the channel sweep during our anchorage. During our crew brief we covered NATOPS, then discussed all the crew-coordination requirements, from radios to pilot responsibilities throughout all expected flight regimes, including IMC approaches. We also emphasized that the carrier was the best IFR facility available. We would use the FFG as a backup since the local airport didn't have any published approach we could use and its controllers didn't speak English very well.

My copilot and I hit the flight deck. We looked beyond the mouth of the harbor and saw solid IFR; the flight might be more difficult than expected. We preflighted, engaged and waited for a green deck. While we waited, we rechecked our charts of all the places we could fly into cumulo granite if we went IFR; we entered that information into our trusty TACNAV computer.

This harbor was surrounded by mountains and islands with peaks up to 1,500 feet. The winds were characteristically strong for mountainous terrain and affect the weather outside the channel.

The Boss finally gave us a green deck and off we went. We conducted our channel sweep and proceeded out the harbor mouth to check the IFR weather, which we found to begin at about three miles. As the ship cleared the harbor the Boss "charlied" us to pick up the harbor pilot and two host naval officers. After launching, we went IMC at 100 feet and began a climb to VFR on top, which we expected at about 500 feet. We informed departure we were IFR and asked for vectors.

By our plot, their vector took us into one of the highest peaks in the area. I started a two-mile arc around the ship to stay clear of terra firma as my copilot asked departure if they were painting the surrounding mountains on their radar.

We could not see the bow, the stern or the Boss from this position!

"Well, some of them...," they replied weakly, drawing an instant and colorful rebuff from the Boss. My crew voted him an immediate $500 monthly pay raise (unfortunately Navy Finance Center did not share our enthusiasm). We broke out VFR on top at 700 feet and continued to the local airport.

The rapidly deteriorating weather and our non-comprehension of our Portuguese clearances made us happy to be airborne from the local airport. As we made our way through the narrow pass defining the harbor, we were unable to gain visual contact on the FFG or the CV. We remained VFR on top and requested vectors to the FFG. We circled over the FFG for 10 minutes at 800 feet as they tried to convince us that they were really VFR.

Because of the proximity of the FFG to the coast and the lousy weather, we decided to try an approach to the CV. The CV, six miles ahead by now, was clear of the hazardous terrain but well into the rapidly deteriorating weather. Our first approach to 200 feet and a half mile resulted in a missed approach. The ship offset the second CCA three degrees to the port side of the ship. I asked my copilot, a crusty lieutenant commander, why they were doing this.

"So we won't fly into the bridge," he replied. That was not the positive response I wanted. Again we rebriefed the approach. I would fly and stay on the gauges. My copilot would handle all comms and look for the ship. We briefed the crewmen to be on the lookout for the ship, water, rocks, anything they might pick out of our milky surroundings. We were still IMC when we reached the missed-approach point of our second approach.

As I leveled off, I asked my crew if anyone saw anything. No response. I was just adding power for my missed approach when the copilot said he had the glow of the sodium vapor lights on the island (my skipper had the Boss turn them up as bright as they would go).

"Slow down, slide left and descend to 150 feet," he said. Easier said than done as I performed an instrument quickstop and descent. We had intermittent contact with the wake and then the stern as we reached 150 feet and finally broke out at 100 feet in a hover abeam spot three. We could not see the bow, the stern or the Boss from this position! The Boss advised us not to climb (no chance boss) as he had lost sight of us. We landed and with a flood of congratulations, breathed a sigh of relief.

We learned several valuable lessons during this flight. First, if you brief thoroughly and familiarize yourself with the local area, it will keep your crew ahead of the ball game. Second, crew coordination is crucial. Assigned lookout, communication, navigation and pilot responsibilities saved much worry and eased our workload.

Third, there is a section in the H-3 NATOPS for Air Capable Ship Operations, separate from the CV Operations section, which discusses low-visibility approaches. It states that the pilot in the left seat should fly the approach and maintain an instrument scan while the right-seat pilot scans for the landing environment. This applies to CVs as well as smallboys.

Fourth, man the LSO platform for helo IMC recoveries. We didn't think to ask but it sure would have been nice having somebody on the aft end of the ship to listen for us or possibly steer us from trouble.

Lt. Donohoe flew SH-3s with HS-17. He is now assigned to HS-11.

Almost Eaten by a Giant Clam

By Lt. Scott M. Hogan

Among the most basic procedures we learn in the training command is not to let ourselves be backed into the proverbial "box". Any pilot or NFO who tells you he hasn't felt as though he was "hanging onto the tail" during some hop early in his career is lying. However, with experience and training we eventually get used to the dynamic environment of flight operations. Yet, every now and then, even the most seasoned aviators lose control of a situation and are overcome by such things as get-home-itis or the rush to get the "X".

I am not a salt-encrusted veteran with several cruises under my belt. As a first-tour electronic countermeasures officer (ECMO) I have one cruise behind me. However, on one particular occasion I became so wrapped in getting the "X" that I got caught.

After only two months home from a "short" five-month Desert Storm cruise, my squadronmates and I found ourselves in the middle of another hectic work-up period. The weather the first few days was marginal at best with low clouds and hazy visibility, which limited flight operations. Throw in a few downing discrepancies on startup, and my crew and I had achieved the unenviable record of being canceled on our last three attempts to get off the pointy end. But once again, we prepared to launch.

When we got power, it quickly became evident that we had serious problems with the radio and inertial navigational system (INS). We immediately got the troubleshooters on it, hoping that they would quickly solve the problems and save the hop. With two troubleshooters sprawled over me in the cockpit, I watched the launch start and contemplated yet another cancellation.

With the launch about half complete, our flight deck coordinator said we were to switch into a new bird; ours was hard down. The new plane was just forward of elevator No. 2. Aircraft were launching off catapult No. 1. I should have realized at this point that we were getting behind. We'd have to do a real quick combat start if we were to have any chance of getting this "X".

All four of us did a quick, but thorough, preflight of the jet and waited for the right moment to man up and strap in, during one of the lulls between cat shots. Before the next plane off cat 1 was in his clearing turn, I started up the boarding ladder. Then I realized that in my rush to man up I had forgotten to unpin my seat. As I frantically pulled my seat pins I began to feel the hot blast of a Tomcat in tension. The blast at 12 feet above the deck was stronger and definitely hotter than I had anticipated. I had backed myself into a nice little box.

The situation rapidly deteriorated. As I hung on, half in and half out of the cockpit, I heard the distinctive, familiar, high-pitched whistle of the canopy closing. My first thought was that the backseaters had closed their canopy to get out of the Tomcat's jet blast. But as I turned my head skyward, I saw in fact that my canopy was only inches from my head! To this day I don't know how I got out of its way while balancing on a 10 X 10-inch platform 12 feet above the flight deck! How I heard the canopy closing with aircraft turning all around me is beyond me. I was definitely lucky.

However, my predicament did not end there. Anyone who has worked on or flown EA-6Bs knows that getting on or off a Prowler with the canopies down is difficult (if not downright impossible). To make matters worse, as I contemplated how I was going to get down, a second Tomcat went into tension on cat 1. I huddled my six-foot, three-inch frame as close to the boarding platform as possible and hung on for dear life as the F-14 tried to cook me.

As soon as he launched and the aft canopy was brought up, I climbed down and tried to collect myself. All this had taken place in two minutes but it had seemed like an eternity.

In my rush to man up and save a hop, I abandoned well-established habit patterns. On any "normal" evolution, I would never have manned up where we were spotted with aircraft launching. Obviously, I never checked to make sure the canopy handle was pinned to prevent the canopy from inadvertently coming down, something I've always done since my early days in T-2 training.

In this case, the canopy closing was actuated via the external handle. The flight deck crew had gotten caught up in the rush to get the hop out and had abandoned safety procedures.

This incident took less time than it takes to launch an aircraft, but the breakdown started well before we ever left the first aircraft. ◄

Lt. Hogan is an EA-6B ECMO with VAQ-137.

Welcome to the World of Inverted Flight

By Ltjg. Troy Johnson

I was in primary flight training, with 32 flight hours on the books in the T-34C, BI complete and a FAM 14 solo under my belt. One thing was clear to me: I was an SNA on the move!Going into the precision-acrobatics (PA) syllabus, I felt extremely confident. The PA-l and PA-2 hops were very rewarding flights. I was doing maneuvers I once thought were limited only to air shows. Each flight increased both my abilities and ego.

As my PA-3 solo approached, I felt a little apprehensive. However, the flight seemed to go smoothly. The two-hour hop was more than enough time to complete each maneuver a few times.

The PA-4 check ride was strong, the maneuvers were solid, my EPs by the numbers. Anxious to get to my PA-5 solo, I paid obligatory attention to the ODO's solo brief, and away I went. The weather was great; at 8,000 feet I could see forever. Again I went through the maneuvers: barrel rolls, wingovers, loops, and aileron rolls. After an hour of flying I felt I had completed the requirements but still had a half hour to go. Overconfidence, boredom, curiosity and my own interpretation of the ODO's instructions were about to come together to make for a very interesting next five minutes.

I knew that the NATOPS limit for inverted flight in the T-34C was 15 seconds. I thought a quick excursion into that flight regime would be acceptable — and fun. Gaining airspeed, I raised the nose and with smooth stick and rudder coordination I changed my perspective by 180 degrees. Almost immediately I became disoriented. All normal reference cues were foreign to me. My reactions were slowed because I couldn't interpret the flight instruments quickly enough. When I saw the airspeed increase and altitude decrease, I reacted by pulling back on the stick.

Wrong move. Welcome to the world of inverted spin. Immediately, I knew I was in trouble. The altimeter needle made 360-degree revolutions at an alarming rate and gray became my primary color. The only thing I could think of was procedures. I applied full opposite rudder, which stopped the rotations. I neutralized the rudder and centered the stick. Then, being in an extreme, nose-low attitude, I reduced the PCL to idle, leveled the wings, put the nose on the horizon and recovered my airspeed, leveling out at 3,000 feet.

The climb back to altitude seemed like an eternity, which gave me an opportunity to reflect on my shaking hands with the grim reaper, almost losing an aircraft and nearly ending my career. Once I got on the ground, the lesson of this flight was screamingly clear: you have to follow procedures and policy. My assumption that two solos and 55 flight hours were enough experience to give me leeway over established policy and standards nearly killed me and almost cost the Navy an aircraft. Whether you are a novice or a seasoned fleet pilot, if you push either your own limitations or those established by NATOPS and SOP, you are setting yourself up for disaster. ◀

Ltjg. Johnson is assigned to HSL-40

When the Panic Set In

By Derek Nelson

Pop quiz: Take a student naval aviator and launch him on a perfect morning for flying. The aircraft is working fine. He hasn't taken any drugs, and has no medical or personal problems. The weather doesn't change, but 30 minutes later he can't see a thing. He is conscious, and he hasn't been struck blind. What gives?

Hint: The phrase "can't see a thing" exaggerates a bit. Our student can probably see his knees.

Answer: He is in the middle of a split-S, and he is mistakenly applying power. As a result, snowballing G forces have pinned his head to his chest. He can't see the horizon or scan his instrument panel.

Let's leave him in that dangerous and embarrassing position for a minute, with his nose about an inch from the zipper in the middle of his flight suit, and go back to the beginning.

He has launched on his third precision aerobatics flight, the PA-3 solo. He started out with four touch-and-go landings, then climbed to 7,500 feet for the aerobatics part of his flight.

He is, according to the mishap report that will eventually describe his next few minutes of terror, "well-rested, happy, healthy and ready to fly." He feels ready for anything. Like the author of the accompanying story, he figures that a touch of inverted flight is the ticket to adventure and self-esteem. Unfortunately for his T-34C and his career, what he does next illustrates the vast gulf between "feeling ready" and "being ready."

He rolls inverted after a clearing turn. So far, so good. But he doesn't trim the nose down or keep enough pressure on the stick to keep the aircraft's nose above the horizon. The rapid loss of lift shocks him. With his aircraft inverted and nose down, the increase in airspeed is matched only by the loss of altitude.

He panics and hauls back on the stick as he enters a max-power split-S. During the split-S, he doesn't reduce power to idle. To make matters worse, his harness is either not locked or not cinched tight. His head feels like it weighs about 400 pounds.

Why doesn't he neutralize controls and analyze the aircraft's position? The reason may be "cognitive saturation," but he doesn't have time to savor that impressive piece of aeromedical jargon. He manages to reduce back pressure on the stick to unload the aircraft, stitching together the shreds of his situational awareness with the aircraft nose high at about 3,800 feet.

It is an understatement to say that he has overstressed the aircraft. Other pilots had overstressed this particular aircraft 20 times before this mishap: a dozen in the range of 4.5-to-4.9 G, six 5.0-to-5.4, one 5.5-to-5.9, and one 6.0. But this 21st contortion easily shatters the record. The T-34C's accelerometer reads a maximum of 10.5 G's. Our aerobatics hero has pegged it.

He heads back to base and is cleared to land at the north field. He lands at the south field, instead, a mere footnote to a Class B mishap.

Is there any excuse for this aerobatic fiasco? No. The ensuing mishap report points out that inverted flight is "not specifically listed as prohibited" in the FAM Flight Training Instruction, the Precision Aerobatics FTI, the master curriculum guide or during CNATRA flight support lectures. However, all maneuvers that aren't introduced are prohibited, and the master curriculum guide doesn't specify that inverted flight be demonstrated or introduced. The mishap investigators and the chain of endorsers unanimously agree that the pilot knew the maneuver was prohibited. They express their unanimity with phrases such as "gross breach" and "wanton disregard."

One of them calls the student "an example of what we fear" in the training command: someone who has learned basic flight skills, but who isn't mature enough to follow the rules.

The T-34C limps over to the airplane hospital, where the engineers and mechanics put together a 16-page estimate of repairs to the aircraft. Some of the problems — "dented lower fuselage skin" and "wrinkled upper-wing skin," for example — suggest a mere face lift. However, the ugliness isn't just skin deep. The diagnosis mentions "bent sub-structural stringers" and "out-of-alignment wing-fuselage attach point fittings." The prescription includes major repairs to one wing and 300 man-hours to scrap the center section of the fuselage.

It is the classic no-win situation. The SNA loses the confidence of his superiors and his chance for wings. The Navy strikes $280,000 worth of aircraft carcass from its inventory. ➤

Derek Nelson is editor in chief of Naval Safety Center Publications

No Big Deal

By Lt. John Scheenstra

Jo crew, live ordnance and a single Prowler working the close-air support range during air wing workups at Fallon. It was turning out to be a great day. The brief and preflight were thorough and we launched out to the range to have some fun. Everything went as advertised and we were actually looking at that elusive perfect hop—no mistakes, no misjudgments. Our timing and hits were great and there was no doubt in our JO minds that we would have sent a few of Saddam's finest to paradise.

Coming off target on our final run, we again began aggressive jinking to avoid the simulated threats. Once out of the threat area, we knocked it off and started a climb to return to base. At this point, I noticed that the left throttle would not retard below 85 percent. It made a distinct mechanical thud, the kind of noise that comes from a FODed throttle quadrant.

"Hey, no big deal," I thought.

We discussed our options. The throttle worked fine above 85 percent. We could just make a nice straight-in to a full stop. We were afraid that shutting down the engine would collapse the fuel lines, so we didn't want to do that unless we had to. How about taking a trap? I was comfortable with stopping the aircraft on the long runway available. Plus, I must admit, a large strike was due back any minute and we didn't want to clobber one of the runways.

We decided on a normal rollout and if we encountered any difficulty in slowing the bird down, we would take a trap.

We set up for the straight-in, flew a normal approach and put the aircraft on deck. On touchdown, I retarded the throttles, held the nose up and checked for flaperon pop-ups. Oh, yeah, no pop-ups with one throttle at 85 percent. No big deal, lots of runway ahead. With the asymmetrical thrust, slowing down obviously took more braking but I tried to be easy on the binders. I was getting her slowed down, but it was taking a lot of left brake to do it.

The aircraft seemed to decelerate fine, but required more and more left brake as the rudder lost effectiveness. With half the runway still available, we had slowed to a fast taxi speed and felt like we had it licked. However, the left brake was starting to fade and the jet started a slow right drift.

I applied more, but it didn't help much. We continued to drift, so I engaged nosewheel steering, secured the antiskid and rotated the auxiliary brake handle. No good. I told my BN that I couldn't hold it and was shutting down the left engine. While trying to push my left foot through the floor board, I secured the left-engine fuel master and shut down the right engine. We dribbled off the right side of the runway at about five knots and did a 270-degree turn in the dirt, coming to a stop perpendicular to, and halfway off, the runway. After climbing out we found one molten brake assembly complete with ruptured hydraulic lines and two blown tires.

Where did we go wrong? We were comfortable landing on a 14,000-foot runway with the option of going around, plus we were afraid of blocking a runway and collapsed fuel lines. These things led us to a bad decision. We were given a relatively minor emergency and took it to the point of almost losing an aircraft and crew. If you even consider taking a trap, do it. If arresting gear is not available, shutting down the engine-collapsed lines or not—on touchdown is definitely a better idea than frying your brakes on the rollout.

We had made the worst decision possible and because of that it turned out to be "a big deal."

Lt. Scheenstra is an A-6 pilot with VA-95.

Harnessing the Monster

By LCdr. Matt Scassero

Are you creating a monster, or perhaps just feeding one? If so, why not put the monster to work for you?

Take a good look at your file cabinet of training jackets. You know the one. You shove paper in it and then, a couple of times a year, before a unit eval or safety survey, you "look" at the jacket. You make sure the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted.

"Lord, just get me through this," you moan. But do you use the jacket?

Why do we have training jackets and logbooks? It's not just to give training and NATOPS officers something to do. The jackets do more than verify centurion-trap and thousand-hour patches. We have them to tell us when somebody is ready for a particular mission. Whether it's the long-term quals like water survival or physiology, the annual items such as NATOPS or instrument quals, or more timely items such as flight hours or approaches, the training jackets tell us.

LCdr. Jones has a special instrument ticket, over 2,500 hours in type, and more than 500 traps. Full-up round, right? Any good ops or safety department head knows better. How many hours and approaches has he had in the last six months? In the last month? Perhaps he is coming off a long medical down period. If you are evaluating him, your attitude should be, "What have you done for me lately?"

You say he let his instrument qual expire two years in a row? The "up" stamp or filled-in blocks don't tell the whole story. You have to be able to read between the entries to see the entire picture.

One of the symptoms of a paper monster is rubber-stamp entries, or entering the minimum regardless of actual accomplishments. Six precision and six non-precision approaches on the instrument qual paperwork. "Q" instead of a grade for exam or class scores. Does he repeatedly finish his requirements at the last minute?

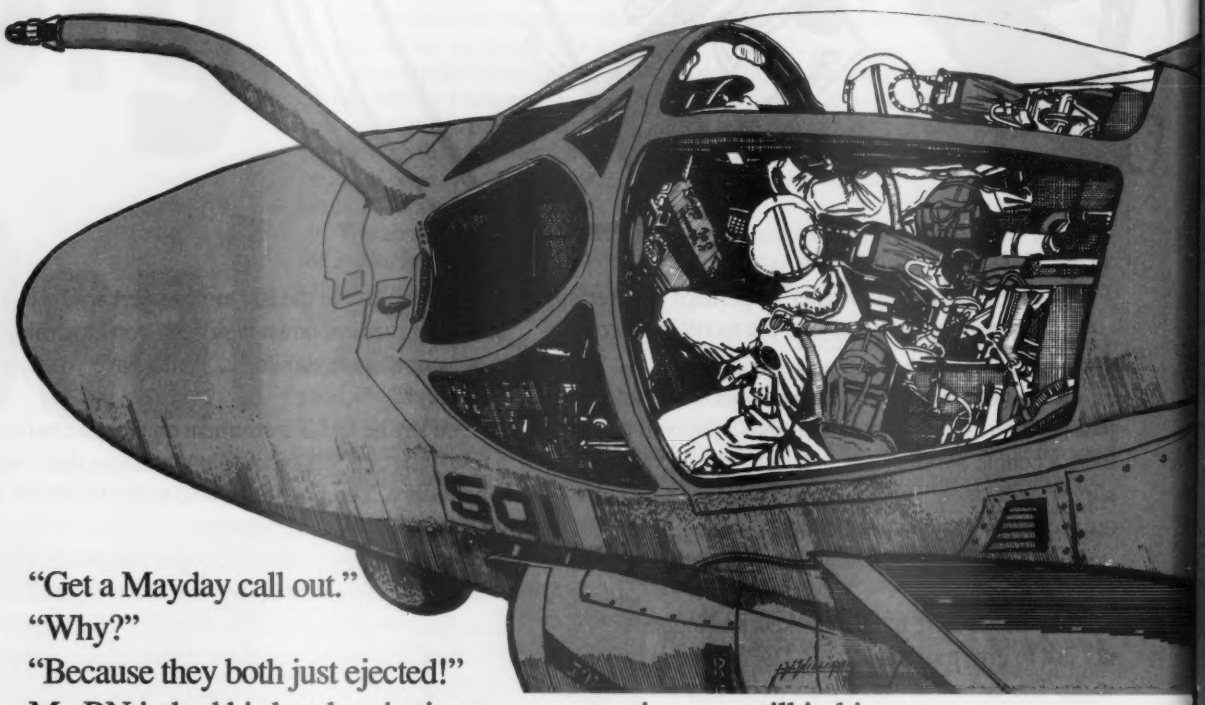
No approaches for five months then he logs six in one flight. If the requirements really make a difference—and they do—then take the time to log them properly.

We are all attuned to missing or expired quals, but we must be equally alert for the indications of a trend, whether individually or as a command. The paperwork we generate on flying is comparatively small so make it work for you. Harness the monster; don't just feed it. ◀

LCdr. Scassero flies with VAQ-136.

A Front Row Seat to an Ejection

By Lt. Rand McNally



"Get a Mayday call out."

"Why?"

"Because they both just ejected!"

My BN jerked his head up in time to see our wingman still in his seat hurtling end over end past our windscreen. The A-6 that I had been flying form on swiftly turned into a rock and plummeted toward the ocean.

As I started a left turn to keep my free-falling wingman and his BN in sight, all I could think was, "Man, those parachutes better open."

It had all happened so fast. The problems with my wingman's aircraft had begun when both engines failed during our off-target rendezvous. We were halfway through an Indian Ocean cruise and had just completed a daytime war-at-sea exercise. After successfully restarting one engine, my wingman told me about his situation. As I joined on him, my BN and I coordinated a ready deck

with the carrier so that our playmate could begin a single-engine straight-in approach immediately upon arrival.

After establishing a cruise position at 5,000 feet MSL, I noticed a glint of light flash straight back along their airplane. After about a millisecond, I realized that the glint was sunlight reflected off their canopy as it was jettisoned.

"Now they're really up against it," I thought. "We're handling all their comm, they're operating on only one engine (an engine that has already flamed out once), and, to add insult to injury, they have a blown canopy. Those guys are going to have to be ultra heads up to get that airplane safely back onboard ship. What else can possibly go wrong for them?"

I didn't have to wonder for very long. As I watched the BN and then the pilot go up the rails, it occurred to me that, regrettably, I had a front row seat to the entire A-6 ejection sequence.

It seemed to take an interminable length of time before their parachutes opened, and, as I waited, an awful feeling of responsibility came over me. Some of the tension eased when their parachutes finally opened, but we still had to make sure the SAR helo located our squadronmates. As we put the recovery effort in motion, several caveats came to mind.

Begin the SAR effort immediately. Include the location of the downed crew as precisely as possible in all transmissions. A TACAN/DME cut, of course, serves this purpose well. There is only one on-scene commander. Don't fly too low or too slow while attempting find or keep sight of the downed aviators. Don't get so busy coordinating the SAR effort that you run out of gas.

All of this advice played a role in our thinking that day. One example of our using these rules was when more senior crews from our squadron felt the natural impulse to take charge of the rescue after they heard about the ejection. I remembered that there is only one on-scene commander and I refused to give up that responsibility to avoid confusion.

We were pleased to see the SAR helo arrive within 10 minutes. My BN and I supplemented the TACAN/DME cuts off the ship with the relative bearing and distances that our friends were from the splash area of their A-6. At first, the helo crew had a hard time locating the crewmembers in the water, but this problem was solved once each of the aircrew popped his orange smoke flare. An important point here is that only the crewmember closest to the helo popped his smoke flare at first. The other crewmember waited until the helo had picked up his playmate before using his own smoke flare, thereby ensuring that his flare would still be putting out smoke when the helo was ready to look for him. We soon learned that both crewmen had been recovered safely aboard the helo without any injuries. Nothing matched the great feeling we had upon finding out that our squadron buddies were OK and ready to buy us drinks at the next port.

> Those guys are going to have to be ultra heads up to get that airplane safely back...

Brief SAR every flight. We did and it definitely helped. It is also a good idea to have a SAR checklist. My BN did. You will probably not be able to see the crew in the water after their parachutes sink. It is disconcerting to lose sight of your playmates, but you really cannot expect to see them in their small, dark rafts while you are flying around at 250 knots. Just remember their positions before their parachutes went under. The mere presence of your aircraft overhead will reassure the downed crew.

The splash area where the A-6 went in was quite visible and lasted for more than 30 minutes. It was helpful as a point of reference to assist the SAR helo in locating the downed aviators.

The aviation mishap board determined that faulty wiring caused this mishap, leading to engine fuel starvation. ◀

Lt. McNally is a Naval Air Reserve pilot flying A-6Es with VA-304. He is also an airline pilot.

Flying with the Hounds from Hell

PHAN Sean D. Flynn

By LCdr. Scot Jones

Before most mishaps there was a chain of events that, if interrupted, would have prevented the mishap. We are taught to be aware of these chains and to ensure we don't become the subject of an MIR. Once in a while we come across a different kind of chain – a *positive* chain of events that prevents a mishap. This is a story about one of these positive chains.

It was a great day to fly in the eastern Mediterranean. The weather was clear for our morning log run to the beach. The brief went well and we manned up after the ATO called and told us that we would be carrying six passengers.

The helicopter had just come out of scheduled maintenance. It had been our best flier to this point in the deployment. We turned up, launched and headed for the beach. Two minutes after launch, one of our UHF radios failed. No problem. We still had one UHF left and a VHF radio so we could talk to anyone we needed.

While we concentrated on navigating and establishing comms with our destination, we noticed a torque split between the two engines. We matched the torques but noticed a T5 split of about 50 degrees C between the engines. Two minutes later, we got a flickering master caution with a main-transmission pressure light. We crosschecked the instruments, and saw that the main-transmission oil pressure was below minimum.

The first crewman confirmed a massive oil leak on the starboard side of the aircraft.

I took the controls, and turned back toward the carrier while my copilot switched to the control frequency of USS Yorktown (CG-48), which was nearby, and began dumping fuel. We declared an emergency and requested a steer back to the CV. When the controller told us the CV was 28 miles away, we asked if there were any ships closer. He told us that his unit was the closest deck at 19 miles and that they were already at flight quarters.

Our cockpit gauges indicated that the transmission was operating on its emergency lubrication system (ELS) and we needed to land as soon as possible. We turned toward the cruiser, briefing them on our intentions en route. The cruiser turned toward us at flank speed to close the distance as quickly as possible.

By the time we were 15 miles from landing, the first crewman had prepared the passengers for ditching. He did such a good job of keeping his poise that the passengers did not realize how serious the emergency was. The torque indications remained low but steady confirming that the ELS was working.

NATOPS says that the ELS can provide up to 30 minutes of operation – or as little as two minutes. When the ELS fails, the transmission begins to disintegrate internally from the heat and friction, making your life very exciting for a very short time.

The recommended flight profile for this emergency is low and slow. NATOPS doesn't specify how low or how slow. Most helicopter pilots will probably tell you that means about 40 feet AGL and minimum power required speed, which is about 70 knots in an SH-3. I elected to stay at 200 feet because that is where I had initially leveled off and I wanted to minimize the power changes as much as possible. I chose 90 knots because of the distance involved. (Further contemplation and reflection has led me to believe that the airspeed side of the equation was right but the altitude was possibly too high).

The ship's H-2 and an aircraft from my squadron had joined on us. By 10 miles the torque was down to 10 percent and the oil pressure was 5 psi. I wasn't sure our luck would hold long enough to make it to the ship so I went through my mental checklist for ditching the aircraft. The ELS was still working and I decided to continue until the first sign of further failure and then land in the water.

At seven miles I could see the ship's wake and they were obviously coming as fast as possible. It was the most beautiful sight I'd seen in 10 years of flying. The controller continued to give me vectors. At five miles, the torque had dropped to five percent and the oil pressure to two psi. This had now become the longest 15 minutes of my life. By three miles the torque was just barely above zero and the oil pressure was buried firmly in the big doughnut.

The ship turned to get the proper winds. We began a shallow descent and completed the landing checklist. I rolled onto final still expecting to go into the water as my first crewman began to give lineup calls. As we crossed the fantail I added power to slow my descent and closure rate. Immediately, the transmission began to scream and howl like the hounds from hell. Only then did our passengers realize the serious nature of the problem.

One of the engines sounded like it had gone to full power which happens automatically when the other engine fails. I momentarily considered sliding off into the water to avoid crashing onto the missile launcher. The aircraft didn't settle, however, so we landed. We made an emergency shutdown and began to breathe again.

After shutting down, we found out that the gear box had suffered a massive leak at the No. 2 input coupling and had gotten so hot that the metal in the chip detectors resembled slag. The ship's crew had heard the grinding and howling all the way forward in CIC. One estimate was that we had less than two minutes of flight time left. My personal estimate was less.

What are the lessons to learn from this? First, if it looks wrong, it usually is. The torque and T5 splits should have been a dead giveaway, but I was preoccupied with completing the mission and dismissed the initial indication. In an emergency such as this, seconds count and not picking up on the indications immediately could have easily cost us an aircraft and possibly lives.

Secondly, don't get so preoccupied with the mission that you forget about flying the aircraft.

The third lesson is that in naval aviation we depend on different people to do their jobs professionally and flawlessly, every day. Fortunately, for my crew, we couldn't have asked for better support. Everyone on the cruiser performed superbly. The controller stayed calm, gave us the necessary vectors and arranged for an escort. The bridge team reacted immediately and assisted in getting us on deck as quickly as possible. Also, the flight deck crew was prepared to deal with any contingency.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize how close this story came to being a Class A mishap. Our chain of positive events occurred because people were ready. Training, preparation and response under pressure are priceless commodities in this business. ◄

LCdr. Jones flies H-3s with HS-15.

Left to right: AW3 Michael Meyer, Lt. Greg Powers, AW3 Louis Faiella, Lt. Burbank Mitchell

Lt. Greg Powers
Lt. Burbank Mitchell
AW3 Michael Meyer
AW3 Louis Faiella
HSL-32

While preparing to refuel in flight, Lt. Powers (HAC) brought his SH-2F into a 40-foot hover alongside USS *Pharris* (FF-1094). He checked hover torque and available power.

Moments later, he and Lt. Mitchell (copilot) heard a loud pop, followed by a loss of power with a rapid, right yaw. After completing the immediate procedures for a single-engine failure, Lt. Powers flew the helicopter down into ground effect, gaining safe airspeed. Lt. Mitchell monitored the instruments, calling out NR, altitude and airspeed.

After stopping their aircraft's descent at 15 feet, the crew climbed to a safe altitude and saw that the No. 2 engine was coming back on line.

As *Pharris*' crew quickly cleared the deck of fuel lines, the helo crew reviewed NATOPS and dumped fuel. They briefed for a single-engine approach, leaving No. 2 engine on line to help with the landing.

With the ship providing a green deck, Lt. Mitchell scanned the instruments, while AW3 Meyer and AW3 Faiella provided range and bearing. Lt. Powers landed as the No. 2 engine failed again.

Inspection revealed that one of the compressor stator vane levers had separated from the No. 2 engine's casing, causing a compressor stall.

Col. J.C. Jackson, USMCR
VMAT-203

During a PMCF, Col. Jackson was decelerating to a Harrier pad for a hover check. At 100 feet AGL and 27 knots ground speed, the nose of his AV-8B broke sharply to the right with a yaw rate of 20 degrees per second. He applied full left rudder with no effect.

Inertia coupling started taking effect, causing the aircraft to roll to the right. Having already lost 40 feet, Col. Jackson quickly added full power and moved the nozzle lever from hover stop (82 degrees) to the 60-degree aft position and recovered. The entire sequence took 5-6 seconds.

Col. Jackson checked controllability on downwind. He had directional control down to 85 knots. He made a slow landing at 95 knots. The Harrier drifted right after touchdown and departed the runway at 15 knots despite Col. Jackson's efforts to counter the drift with opposite rudder and nosewheel steering. The aircraft sustained minor damage to the flap, aileron and outrigger fairing.

Postflight inspection showed that a bolt had been incorrectly installed and had fallen from the rudder bellcrank. The result was the rudder pedals were completely disconnected from all modes of directional control, including the rudder, yaw-reaction control system and nosehweel steering.

BRAVO ZULU

Lt. Dan O'Neill
VFA-131

Immediately after launching from USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69), Lt. O'Neill's F/A-18 had a dual-generator failure. Although he was able to reset his right generator, he had no radios and had no flight information on his DDIs or HUD.

Lt. O'Neill joined overhead on the first aircraft he saw, an F-14, and established communication with the Tomcat crew using HEFOE signals and his PRC-90. The ship vectored LCdr. Tanner, who had launched just before Lt. O'Neill, toward the first Hornet. Meanwhile, Lt. O'Neill was experiencing repeated recycling of both generators and could not keep either one steadily on line.

Darkness was approaching, and LCdr. Tanner, with Lt. O'Neill on his wing, began to descend for an approach. Again, Lt. O'Neill's generator dropped off-line. Over the PRC-90, LCdr. Tanner instructed Lt. O'Neill to secure and reset various pieces of electronic gear, which resulted in regaining the right generator. Still without a radio and cockpit displays, Lt. O'Neill was able to dirty up his aircraft for a modified night CV-1 approach.

LCdr. Tanner used the relay feature of his ARC-182 radios to make sure that the LSOs could talk to Lt. O'Neill on final. Lt. O'Neill made an OK-3 underline pass, with his remaining generator failing on touchdown.

The two Hornet pilots' skill and teamwork saved the Hornet because the carrier was conducting blue-water operations beyond normal bingo range to a divert field. The battery power of Lt. O'Neill's Hornet may not have been enough to fly to the field.

Lt. Chip King
VF-45

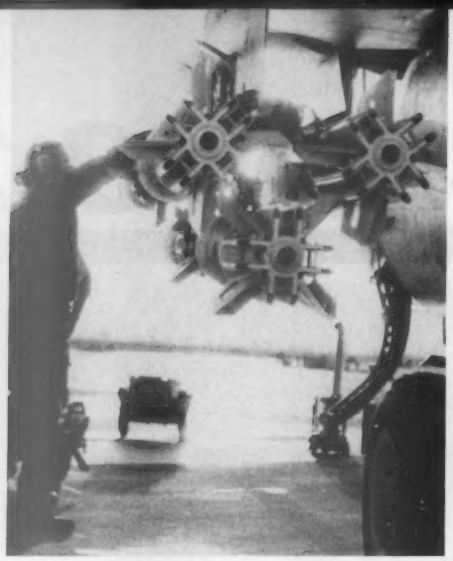
Lt. King was returning to NAS Key West after a DACT hop. While going through his landing checklist, he saw that he had an unsafe indication for his right main gear. He immediately entered the Delta pattern and asked for a check from a nearby F/A-18.

The Hornet pilot confirmed the F-5E's right main gear was only about 40 percent down. Lt. King went through the procedures for alternate gear release, but the gear still indicated unsafe. Then, he tried several changes in airspeed, and applied positive and negative G's. The F/A-18 pilot reported the gear was approximately 80 percent extended.

Reviewing NATOPS, Lt. King faced a hazardous landing or an ejection. His fuel state now allowed only one or two approaches before a flameout. He decided to try a minimal-sink-rate touch-and-go to get the gear to extend fully. If that did not work, he intended to turn out over the Gulf of Mexico and eject.

Completing the touch-and-go with minimum impact, Lt. King raised the nose to climb out. As the F-5 lifted off, he saw a safe indication for his right main gear. He eased the aircraft back on deck and rolled out.

Trust, But Verify



By Cdr. Rick Cassara

We were well into the first month of the war when I was assigned as alternate strike leader on a mission against a kill-box target in southeastern Iraq. Planning for these strikes was pretty simple by now, with prearranged holding and control points, and canned IPs.

Our loadout would also be standard—10 Mk-82 LDGP bombs on the outboard stations, an ALQ-167 pod on the starboard side inboard, and a 500-pound LGB on the port side, inboard.

We would make one pass to drop all 10 Mk-82s on artillery revetments, followed by a reset to attack the same area from a different direction after the flak died down. The idea was to try to pick out a tank as a target for the second run. By now, the LGBs were only being used against tanks. Everyone wanted to find a tank so they could drop the LGB, help the grunts, and get some good VTR.

My aircraft was parked behind an E-2 in the Hummer Hole that night...always a bad spot because ordnance could not be loaded until the E-2 ahead had started and taxied out. The concern was the hot exhaust on our bombs. As usual, the deck was running a bit behind in spots, an unavoidable problem considering the op tempo.

By the time the ordies started hanging bombs on my jet, the launch was well underway. I had already completed my preflight except of the bombs and I was "patiently" waiting for the ordies to finish the work. Once the bombs were hung and the cads installed, we got power on the plane and I could start my alignment.

The ordies finally looked like they were done (it was dark), so I dismounted and began preflighting the bomb racks. Everything looked fine except that some work still needed to be done on the LGB. By now, an impatient yellow shirt was threatening to shut us down and launch the spare. I looked at the men working on the laser bomb. It seemed that the gunner and ordnance chief were QAing the load.

Despite the little feeling in my gut that normally warned me of making a bad move, I assumed that these two pros would ensure that the bomb was ready, and I climbed the boarding ladder without waiting for them to finish.

A sharp-eyed troubleshooter spun us off the catapult when he noticed that the LGB was not swayed down and would not have taken the cat shot well. The moral of the story is that we preflight everything for a reason. It's not that we don't trust those who work on our aircraft, but that the double- and triple-checks really do prevent a lot of mistakes. "Trust, but verify" is a good way of looking at it.

By the way, because of that sharp-eyed troubleshooter, I launched with a properly loaded LGB and 60 minutes later, bagged my first tank!

Cdr. Cassara is the CO of VA-145.

Don't Trust Anyone!

By Lt. Robert Roth

During Desert Storm, a hot spin on the fantail became the rule rather than the exception for the E-2s onboard USS *Ranger* (CV-61). It allowed for an expeditious relief for one of the two Hawkeyes already airborne in the North or Central Arabian Gulf.

During a typical E-2 hot spin, the copilot, radar operator and air control officer would exit the aircraft with the left engine turning, to let the oncoming pilot and mission commander debrief their counterparts, who were still in the aircraft. The mission commander's debrief normally took a little longer, leaving the offgoing commander to negotiate the flight deck by himself.

I hate being on the flight deck any time, not to mention during a war – alone and at night. The handlers had a neat trick: they tucked the E-2 snugly against the rounddown. The crew had to jog under the nacelle with a turning prop trying to blow them over, then make an immediate halt just before the big plunge. Then they had to squeeze forward past the prop again.

One night, after two strikes, I debriefed the mission commander (my skipper) and made it all the way through the Hummer O-course. I was safely in front of the aircraft. I noticed that two alert fighters had been called away and knew there would be quite a bit of activity on the deck, along with the E-2 I was standing in front of.

I figured I would just latch onto one of the safety chain watches and he would lead me safely to the line shack. He sensed what was going on and decided to lead me to the catwalk just forward of the LSO platform so I could go straight down to the ready room.

I trusted him. He was a petty officer who had worked on the flight deck the entire three years I had been with the squadron. He also worked for me when I had a division. I was sure that he'd never try to kill me; I had given him great evals.

As we headed toward the catwalk, I noticed an F-14 being spotted on cat 4. About the time we would have jumped into the catwalk, the Tomcat would have gone into tension. Either my helmet would have melted or we would have been blown overboard.

I tugged at my trusty leader and pointed to the possible hazard. We both made a hard right turn and went the long way through the island.

For a split second, I was going to follow him without question because of his experience on the flight deck. Afterward, we talked about the situation and decided he was a little too comfortable around the deck and a little too eager to show me the way.

I still trust him, and I'd follow him again. But my head will stay on a swivel. ◀

Lt. Roth flies with VAW-116.

The Flyoff Isn't Worth Two LOX Bottles in the Birdcage

By LCdr. Jim Butler

The crew of the Intruder was in the worst possible situation. The fly-off launch had already started, and it seemed like the entire air wing was turning. Aircraft were taxiing to the catapults and rumbling off the front end toward home. Now it was their turn.

The start went easily enough; both engines spooled up and roared to life just as planned. The inertial alignment was as tight as any the BN had seen. In fact, this looked like it was going to be a piece of cake.

"Here comes the yellow shirt," the pilot said. "They're breaking us down."

"Roger that," his BN replied. "I'm all ready to go. Takeoff checks complete with the exception of the wings, flaps, slats and runup."

At that point, the pilot shoved the parking brake in and began following the taxi directors for launch.

No aviator enjoys wearing an oxygen mask, so it's usually the last checklist item completed just as the aircraft begins to taxi. So it was with this crew. As the aircraft began to move and turn from cat 2 toward the island, they both turned their oxygen switches on and swung their masks up. The masks were snugly attached to their faces.

It took only a few seconds before the BN said to the pilot, "Hey, pal, we've got a big problem and it's called no oxygen flow."

The following is a "black box" transcript of the ICS conversation between the pilot and bombardier up to the launch of their aircraft.

Pilot: Ah, that's no big deal .... we'll just fly home below FL230 .... where we have good cabin pressure.

BN: You've got to be kidding! We have to call the Boss and get a troubleshooter to look back in the birdcage to see if something is wrong back there.

Pilot: Hey, I've seen this before .... don't sweat it ... there's nothing major wrong back there ... the AMEs just forgot to hook the bottles up. We'll just stay low if we don't have flow after the launch.

BN: I've seen LOX gauges spin and solid oxygen lights on the annunciator panel, but I've never had no oxygen flow before. I think we should call the Boss. We don't know what's wrong back there... the bottles may not even be bracketed in.

Pilot: OK, do what you want. I think you're making a big deal out of nothing. Go ahead, call him. He'll sideline us and we may not get out of here at all today.

By now, they were just behind the cat 1 JBD and the aircraft in front of them launched. It was now or never. The BN was angry and somewhat intimidated by the lack of support from his pilot and never called the Boss. He later said that it was the worst cat shot he ever rode through.

Launching in an aircraft that had an "unknown" gremlin in it went against this BN's grain and started to really bother him. The aircraft smoothly rotated and began its climb for a case I departure. To make a long story short, they flew 1,200 miles to their home base with good cabin pressure with no incidents. Uneventful landing or not, the fly-off and reunion with their families were ruined by what the crew found when they tried to lower the birdcage.

Something was obviously wrong when the birdcage would only lower about three inches. Both crewmen realized how stupid and how lucky they were when they discovered that two full LOX bottles were pinned inside against the forward section of the birdcage and would not let it lower normally.

This crew proved that flyoffs are easily the most dangerous evolutions in naval aviation. No flight is so important that one should risk his life or aircraft just to get launched to complete a sortie or to get home.

The next time you are faced with a situation where you ask "Well, what do you think, should we take it?", remember the guys with the LOX bottles. ◄

LCdr. Butler was attached to VA-95 as a BN.

ALL Terrain Tomcat

By LCdr. Chris Berg

To polish a nugget, you should put it under stress to smooth out its rough edges. Bouncing for my first boat det, I had the chance to scrape off a few of my own rough edges.

After racing around the night FCLP pattern for the required passes, my pilot turned our F-14 downwind for a full stop. Tower cleared us to land on the shorter of the dual runways. As we rolled into the groove, the aircraft's combined hydraulic pressure started fluctuating. There wasn't much to do on final except hope the pressure didn't fail until we stopped. We touched down and the hydraulic pressure went to zero—not a big deal with aux brakes and the long-field gear, although the 8,000-foot runway was looking shorter.

We quickly found out that there was no combined pressure because there was no fluid. The hydraulic line leading to the wheel brakes had broken and we were without any brakes. Still, the long-field gear was available. The pilot put the hook down 1,000 feet before the arresting gear, just as NATOPS advised, but as we passed the wire, there was no reassuring tug. We were still moving at 60 knots as we went off the end of the runway. The pilot secured both engines to prevent FODing them and as the generators dropped off the line, things suddenly got real quiet and very dark.

Faced with the choice of a rocket ride and nylon letdown, or an out-of-control four-wheel ride across rolling terrain, we both decided to stay with the aircraft. Under different circumstances, or with another type of all-terrain vehicle, our decision might not have been wise. We came to rest about 3,000 or 4,000 feet off the runway with

no damage to the aircraft. To add insult to injury, the friendly base security detail jokingly gave us a ticket for doing 60 in a 25 zone.

I now brief any pilot I fly with on what he can expect from me in a similar situation. The biggest factor affecting my decision to eject or stick with the plane is terrain. The end of the runway at NAS Cubi or NAS Alameda is a lot different than at NAS Miramar. The Tomcat works fairly well as an offroad vehicle, but I don't think I want to investigate its performance as a submersible.

As part of my preflight planning when going into an unknown field, I look for elevation dropoffs near the runway, especially a dropoff ending in the water. Obstacles are part of the terrain. To me, 60,000 pounds of F-14 beats anything smaller than a 10-ton truck. Groundspeed makes a difference, too. Thirty tons at 50 mph has a lot of kinetic energy, but with flat terrain and the motors off, dirt and weeds will only make for an exciting ride.

Flight-deck ejections deserve consideration, too. Flight-deck geography can be thought of as terrain. Out on the deck, there's a six-story building to worry about. With the pilot's ejection biased left, and the RIO going to the right, aircraft orientation and overhangs decide who may hit the island after ejecting.

Know which side of the aircraft you're going to be launched from. Most crews routinely brief end-speed criteria for ejections off the cat, but how late can you afford to wait if the jet skids off the deck at less than a fast walk?

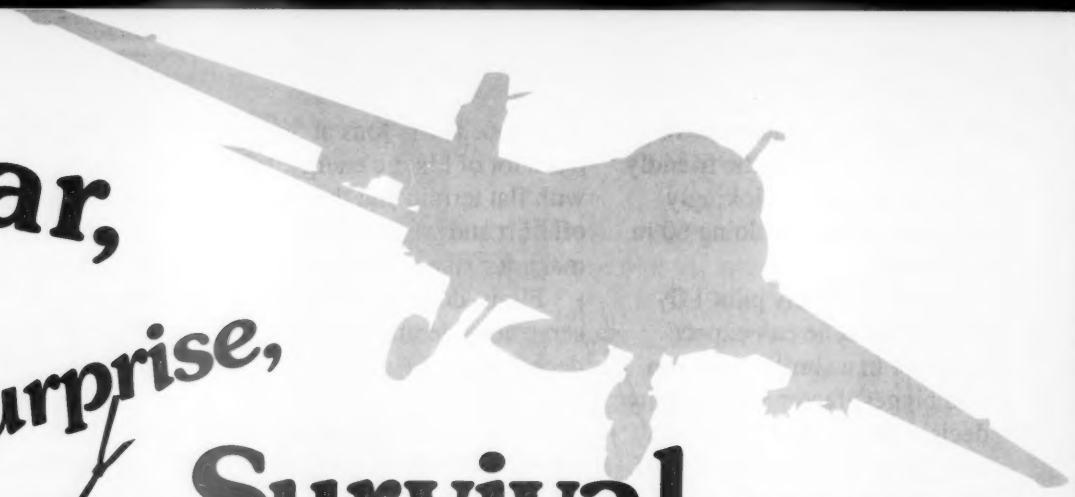
In the Tomcat, the pilot may have a tougher time making it out safely than the RIO in a lot of cases. The pilot is farther forward when the nose falls through, and the ejection sequence fires the RIO first. That means that the pilot is probably more vulnerable and may decide to eject earlier than the RIO.

As a RIO, you may have a hard time seeing where the aircraft is going or what's in front of it at any given moment. For anything less than a concrete wall or another airplane, my pilot makes the decision to leave the aircraft based on an impending collision. So, without abdicating my responsibility to make the decision to eject, I tell my pilot how I feel in the brief.

Four-wheeling in an F-14 makes a great story. At the time, it was equal parts of fun and fear, better than a carnival ride. Sticking with Grumman iron allowed my pilot and I to walk away unscathed and the aircraft to return to the flight schedule in a few days.

LCdr. Berg flies with VF-154.

...NAS Cubi or NAS Alameda is a lot different than at NAS Miramar.



Fear, Surprise, Survival

By LCdr. Raymond D. Lariviere, Jr.

After many years and several revisions, I thought I had my ejection brief down pat: "For any high altitude or deliberate ejection, the call will be 'Eject, eject, eject!' For low altitude or close to the ground on takeoff and recovery, pulling the handle will be the signal to get out." I've quoted that brief many times, but never put it to the test, until one day onboard USS Ranger (CV-61).

The deck was nearly empty as she rolled easily off the coast of southern California. Once again, a low cloud layer clung to the coast. The training command CQ was canceled and it was showtime for the "Golden Intruders." My pilot (a CAT I) and I (a CAT II) had walked early. We found our jet by the island, preflighted it, and hopped in. We started up, taxied and launched CASE II. The first trap was routine. As we launched into the bolter pattern, the next, my 277th, would be anything but routine.

"Eight Two Zero, Intruder, Ball, three point four."

"Roger, ball," the LSO answered.

A "little power" bought us a fair.

We slammed on the deck and caught the two-wire. Full power, boards in. The Intruder decelerated madly. But just as the aircraft should have stopped, something happened. The aircraft suddenly lurched forward and began to accelerate. Experience had taught me either you stop or you don't; there's no in between on arrestments.

Instantly, I knew it was bad. I'll never forget that feeling, as it was impossible to describe it. Fear, surprise, survival, a dozen emotions all mixed together—an almost sickening feeling deep in the gut. I knew it was time to act.

Unfortunately, when the hook truss separated, my head had been thrown forward so I couldn't see out the canopy. Immediately, I snapped my head up. What I saw was totally unexpected. The aircraft had veered right and instead of the angled deck, I saw we were headed straight for the F/A-18s spotted on the port bow. There was no time to think, only react. Time to punch out right? After all, "on takeoff or recovery, pulling the handle will be the signal to get out." Wrong! I had a new guy next to me and I couldn't leave him behind. Incredibly, I yelled "Eject!" and went for the handle. Deep inside, I thought it was the end.

My pilot beat me out by a tenth of a second. Caught out of position by the seat (my chin was slammed into my chest), I watched myself shoot out the cockpit. A half a second later, our doomed A-6 smashed into three F/A-18s and went over the side. Less then three and a half seconds had elapsed from the time the hook separated until the Intruder hit the Hornets. Miraculously, no one, including the ground crew, was seriously injured.

As I look back on my unsolicited Martin-Baker test flight, there was one lesson that speaks loud and clear to me. The lesson learned is that in extremes, I will react not as I have briefed, but as I have practiced. In the simulator I have reacted many times to a call for ejection. Someone yells "Eject!" and we pull the handles—no questions asked. Never, however, have I reacted, real or otherwise, to the sound of an ejection seat. Would I have left my pilot behind if I had just pulled the handle? Afterward, in medical, he confessed that his first reaction was to try to stop the aircraft. That was a nonstarter. Did my call for ejection make the difference? He thanked me for saving his life. Clearly the call "eject" elicits an instinctive response.

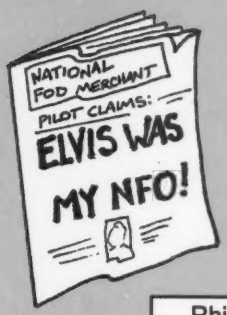
And so, we return to the brief. A few years ago, the last words of one of my close friends were, "Eject, eject, eject!" He saved his BN, but not himself. I reacted to that accident by thinking, "Every man for himself." On my 277th trap, I learned that attitude, too, was flawed. We had less than three and a half seconds to analyze, decide, and act. It can't get much closer than that. Nevertheless, we had time for one call—one "Eject!" to save us both. ◄

LCdr. Lariviere is a BN with VA-52.

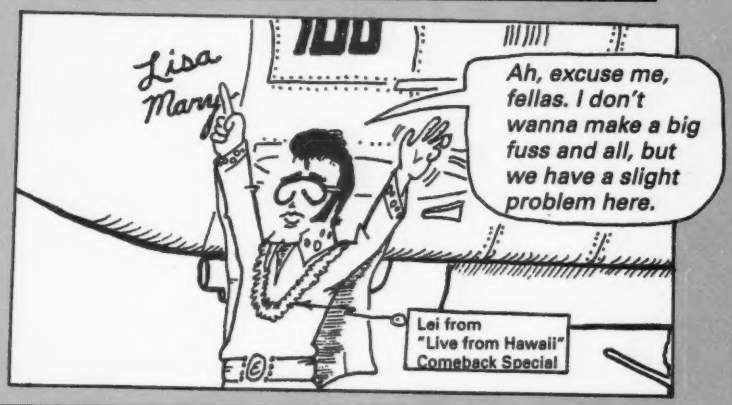
BROWNSHOES IN ACTION COMIX

"The kind real aviators like"

By Lt. Ward Carroll



"When I got to the airplane, he had already convinced the corrosion boys to stencil 'Lisa Marie' on the nose..."


Lisa Marie
Ah, excuse me, fellas. I don't wanna make a big fuss and all, but we have a slight problem here.
Lei from "Live from Hawaii" Comeback Special

Rhinestones dropped like flies during his karate demo that fortunately coincided with a FOD walkdown.

"He sounded great on the radio, though..."

He refused to wear flight gear, save a helmet and an oxygen mask...

Don't leave it for the next aircrew.

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When you find gripes, take the time to write them up.

Poster idea contributed by Ltjg. Frank Dowd and Ens. James Rocha, HM-14